



Public Charge Fact Sheet *For Customers and Students*

1. What is public charge?

A non-U.S. citizen can be called a “public charge” if an immigration official thinks they are likely to depend on government benefits in the future. Being called a public charge can impact a person’s application for permanent residency (green card). It can also impact a green card holder who leaves the U.S. for more than six months and wants to come back. Checking if someone might become a public charge started on February 20, 2020.

An immigration official will look at many different factors in a person’s green card application to decide if they might become a public charge. These factors include age, health, financial status, work experience, English proficiency, and use of certain public benefits. Some factors are rated as positive and some factors are rated as negative.

2. What public benefits are a factor in being called a “public charge”?

- Cash assistance from federal, state, local, or tribal government. Examples include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as Food Stamps
- Medicaid (with exceptions for emergency services, children under 21 years old, pregnant women, and 60 days of post-partum services)
- Federal Public Housing, Section 8 housing vouchers, and Section 8 project-based rental assistance

3. Will participating in a workforce program or taking a class to improve my English or get a high school diploma impact my public charge determination?

It is important to talk to a legal clinic or speak to a lawyer about your case. However, the public charge policy states that participating in a workforce program, improving your English, or taking a class to get your high school diploma are positive factors. In your application, you will need to include proof of your participation in these classes and programs. You can ask your school or workforce organization to give you these documents.

4. Does public charge impact all immigrants?

No. People with certain immigration statuses are exempt from public charge: refugees, asylees, survivors of trafficking and other serious crimes, self-petitioners under the Violence Against Women Act, and Special immigrant juveniles. You should seek advice from a lawyer to understand how this rule will be applied in your case.

More information is online on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website:
<https://www.uscis.gov/greencard/public-charge>.